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HAMLET AS A RELIGIOUS PARODY

Introduction

There is a renewed interest in identifying the use of Jewish sources, such as the *Mishnah,* the *Talmud* and the *Zohar*, in the Shakespearean plays, as evidenced by Michael Posner's recent article on this subject in the Spring 2010 issue of *Reform Judaism* magazine. The existence of such Jewish-sourced material in the plays opens the possibility that the Marrano Jewish poet Amelia Bassano Lanier (1569-1645), identified by A.L. Rowse as the so-called 'Dark Lady of the Sonnets', was a hitherto unrecognized collaborator on these plays, in addition to the half dozen recognized male collaborators.

It is possible to assess the scope of that collaboration by examining the allegorical parodies of Christianity that the plays contain. These have been recognized, in an ad hoc fashion, in work on individual plays by scholars such as Patricia Parker and Steve Sohmer. By taking the example of *Hamlet,* I will demonstrate that these parodies are not incidental, but are essential to the entire structure of the play. Given that neither William Shakespeare, as a covert Catholic, nor any of the other known collaborators would have had any motivation for creating an anti-Christian parody – and that Fletcher, Wilkins, Massinger and Middleton, who were the known collaborators of the 1600s, did not include such parodies in their own independent writings – it therefore follows that we must seek an additional co-author with the right motivations.

As a Marrano Jew, Amelia Bassano is just such a potential co-author. She published her own 1800 line parody of the gospel, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611), which has been recognized by feminist scholars like Schnell and Guibbory as a satirical challenge to Christian doctrines such as original sin, and the need for a redeemer. As such, Bassano would have been in a position to contribute the Hebrew and Jewish knowledge found in the plays, as well as their anti-Christian allegories . Furthermore there is a mass of circumstantial evidence: she came from a family involved in theatrical productions, her first cousin was the lutenist Robert Johnson who wrote most of the music that survives for the plays, and for a decade she was mistress to Lord Hunsdon, who not only was Lord Chamberlain responsible for regulating the whole of the English theatre, but was also Patron of the Company that from 1594 performed the Shakespearean plays.

If this contention is correct, the extensiveness of the allegorical parodies in *Hamlet* suggests that her role as a co-author was substantial and included the overall play design, the deep structure, and the management of the composition to fulfill the allegorical template. Moreover, given that similar allegories can be identified across the majority of the plays, it is likely that she was responsible for all of them -- in which case her role, unlike that of other collaborators, spanned the entire period during which the plays were written.

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The use of allegory

Allegory is used in literature to communicate hidden meanings—something noted by Elizabeth I's cousin, Sir John Harington. And at the Elizabethan Court, solving allegorical puzzles was a major pastime. Of course allegory has a much longer historical provenance than Elizabethan England. It was used both in classical Greece and in the Hebrew Bible and was also used in the mystery plays.

So the use of allegory was a well established literary trope in English literature by the time of the Shakespearean plays. Indeed it had recently been used in an unusually blatant fashion in *The Fairie Queen*. Nor has the use of allegory and personified characters – indeed, Christian allegory – in the Shakespearean plays gone unnoticed. For instance, Patricia Parker has shown that Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are a comic allegory of Jesus and the Church in a parody of the Apocalypse which all goes wrong. Steve Sohmer identified *Julius Caesar* as containing an "impious parody", in which the historical details of Caesar's death are turned into a comic parody of the death of Christ. Similarly he identified *Othello's* allegorical sub-plot as containing a parody of the Virgin Mary (Desdemona), presumably pregnant, being smothered in revenge by an allegorical jealous Joseph (Othello) on the night before Easter, thereby echoing the body of Jesus in the tomb with its face covered by a handkerchief.

Covert anti-Christian commentary was hardly foreign to the English stage. There was much Puritan opposition to stage plays because of the deep Puritan discomfort with the stage, and plays like Nicholas Udall's *Jack Juggler* contain various satirical asides about Christian doctrine. But none of these represent systematic theological critiques. By contrast, the Shakespearean allegories are both systematic and extensive. The last time they received much systematic attention was in the 1930s. Prominent scholars such as G.Wilson Knight tried to show how the 3,000 religious references in the plays created a consistent Christological allegory, but they failed. It is now clear why. The allegories do not reflect conventional Christian doctrine, and scholars nearly a century ago were therefore not well situated to apprehend them within the constraints of their worldview. They are,rather, a parody of Christian doctrine, and appear to be written from a non-Christian and possibly a Jewish theological perspective.

PART ONE: HAMLET AS AN ALLEGORY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Literary Sources For *Hamlet*

In the identification of sources, this paper follows a few scholars like R.G Latham, John Corbin and Charlton M. Lewis---mostly writing at the turn of the 20th century---by assuming that the German *Der Bestrafte Brudermord* is the Ur-Hamlet, and is a version of Thomas Kyd's English play. Written originally around 1580, this has survived only in German, which was retranslated back into English as *Fratricide Punished*. Drawing on histories such as those of Saxo-Grammaticus and Belleforest, it is set in Denmark, and begins with a long pseudo-classical introduction. Then the play proper begins with two soldiers waiting, a ghost, and the entrance of Hamlet, who discusses the ghost with the

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men. Then the Gertrude character enters and dissuades Hamlet from going to Wittenberg, and the Polonius character says that his son has already gone to France. He then returns to announce that Hamlet is mad, and Ophelia enters to complain Hamlet is troubling her. Then the actors arrive, Hamlet makes a few rather pedestrian remarks about acting, and asks to see their play about king Pyrrhus, which is about pouring poison into a brother's ear, and so on. The play contains no allegories and no religious references.

The second important source is a long allegorical religious poem *A Fig for Fortune* (1596) written by a Roman Catholic, Anthony Cowley. It has 3 sections about the hero, Elizan, a sort of Elizabethan everyman. In these three sections,

- the ghost from hell and the goddess of revenge urge Elizan to murder and revenge;
- there is a graveyard scene in which the hermit equipped with a skull full of worms and the picture of a grave urges Elizan to stop being a beast and follow Christ and let go of his impious melancholy;
- there is a scene clearly based on the *Book of Revelation,* in which the hermit leads Elizan to the heavenly Jerusalem, the temple of Sion, where the forces of Jerusalem overcome the Whore of Babylon.

Hamlet borrows language and ideas from this poem, particularly in the graveyard scene--- but turns them upside down. So Hamlet meets a gravedigger with the skulls, but instead of giving up his melancholy and following Christ, he does exactly the opposite. As we shall see, instead of ceasing to be a beast, Hamlet goes on and becomes one of the beasts of Apocalypse from the *Book of Revelation.*

The third major source for *Hamlet,* first identified by Linda Hoff, is the *Book of Revelation* itself. This is the last book of the Christian Bible and describes the Apocalypse or Doomsday, the most sacred event in Christian theology because it describes the second coming of Christ, at which time he will inaugurate a messianic age. *Revelation* describes a great battle between the forces of evil (the beast and the whore of Babylon, the beast from the sea, the Anti-Christ and the king of the pit), all of whom are opposed against the forces of God led by Christ and the Woman crowned with the sun. The forces of Christianity win in the end and a new heavenly Jerusalem descends from the sky.

Structurally, the *Book of Revelation* is constructed upon a theme of sevens: seven trumpets, seven letters to seven churches, seven seals, seven judgments and seven bowls pouring out plague. For instance, the seven trumpets are sounded across chapters 8-11 of *Revelation*. Trumpet 1 is associated with hail, fire and brimstone. Trumpet 2 with a great mountain and fire falling into the sea. Trumpet 3 with a star called Wormwood. Trumpet 4 with eclipses and darkness of the sun, moon and stars. Trumpet 5 is associated with the abyss, and locusts like horses. Trumpet 6 is associated with a great river. Finally trumpet 7 is associated with thunder, and unleashes seven bowls of God's wrath which are poured out by seven angels.

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Hamlet's Structural Resemblance to the Book of Revelation

Perhaps the most startling thing about *Hamlet* is that it features a similar catalogue of sevens to the *Book of Revelation*. *Revelation* has seven angels. So does *Hamlet*. *Revelation* has seven trumpet blasts, so does *Hamlet*. *Revelation* has seven letters, so does *Hamlet*. Then *Hamlet* goes on and creates its own catalogue of seven songs, seven soliloquies and the prophesied seven-fold deaths that accompany the slaughter of Cain.

- **7 trumpets** The trumpet blasts are 1,2,1, 1,2,128; 1,4,7; 2,2,364; 3,2,89; 3,2,133; 5,1,220.

- **7 Angels** appear in *Hamlet* "So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,","like an angel, in apprehension how like a god","Of habits devil, is angel yet in this","A ministering angel shall my sister","Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay","And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!","angels and ministers of grace defend us!"

- **7 Letters** Claudius' letter to England, Norway's letter to Claudius delivered by Voltemand, and Hamlet's five letters to Ophelia, Horatio (4.6.8-28),Gertrude (4,7.36), Claudius (4.6.20 and 4.7.36-46) and to the King of England (5.2.31-35).

- **7 Soliloquies** 'O that this too sullied flesh would melt' (1.2); 'O all you host of heaven' (1.5; 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' (2.2) ; 'To be, or not to be, that is the question' (3.1) ; 'Tis now the very witching time of night' (3.3): 'And so a goes to heaven' (3.3) : 'How all occasions do inform against me' (4.4).

- **7 Songs** which are sung in snatches. Why Let the Strucken Deer (3.2) Hobbyhorse (3.2), Bonny Sweet Robin (4.5), Tomorrow is St Valentine's Day (4.5), Walsingham (4.5) And Will He not Come Again (4.5), I loathe that did love (5.1).

- **7 fold Deaths** for the death of Cain/Claudius (Genesis 4:15 states that there will be seven deaths if Cain is killed, and in addition to Cain/Claudius there are 7 corpses).

The Chiastic design

The literary structure of *Hamlet* is very unusual. In Elizabethan England chiasmus as a literary form, was used, even by writers like Spenser, in an unsophisticated way. Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford for instance, merely used simple chiastic structures taken from the classical rhetorical tradition. Yet Jan Blits has shown that the entirety of *Hamlet* is composed using a highly complex chiastic ring structure. It is written as a series of linked rings, with internal symmetry within each scene, as well as overall symmetry between scenes. For instance, the third scene, in which we meet Ophelia, is balanced by the third scene from last, in which she dies. The fifth scene tells of Hamlet being driven mad for Ophelia's love; in the fifth scene from the end, Ophelia sings madly of love. These are just two examples of an extensive chiastic structure that resembles that found in Biblical literature such as the *Book of Revelation*.

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The Forces of Heaven and Hell in *Hamlet*

But it is not only aspects of the structure of the play that follow *Revelation*. The characters do as well. As Linda Hoff has shown, the playwright has transformed the characters from Kyd's Ur-Hamlet into allegories for the characters from *Book of Revelation*. The characters are divided into two different families, one good and the other evil. Lets look, first, at the forces of Christianity who form the first Triad. This is the family of Polonius.

- **Ophelia,** is both an allegory for the Virgin Mary and also for Mary's equivalent in the *Book of Revelation*, the Woman crowned with the sun. Work by Chris Hassel has shown that the way that Ophelia is interrupted while sewing and reading is a parody of the annunciation to the Virgin Mary. The references to pregnancy and maggots in a dead dog are allusions to medieval theology about how Mary conceived and remained a virgin. Ophelia's death singing lauds and with a coronet is a parody of the 'Assumption of Mary' into heaven to be crowned.

- **Laertes,** is the resurrected Christ who leaps out of the grave. The reason why this young man bears the otherwise inappropriate name of an elder is presumably that he is rejuvenated, just as the old Laertes was in Homer by Athena. He is acclaimed by the rabble as their "lord", and declares that he will stretch out his arms like the "kind life-rendering pelican" feeding people with his blood-- a well-known Christ symbol.

- **Polonius,** as the father of the Virgin Mary and of Christ, is presumably God the Father.

The second Triad is the Danish family who represent the forces of evil, the forces of Anti-Christ. Cherrell Guilfoyle has suggested that the setting of the play in Denmark is a signifier of the Anti-Christ status of this second Triad. The Danish for Denmark is Danmark, and the Danes were accordingly sometimes believed to be the offspring of the tribe of Dan, described in the Bible as a serpent, and whose tribe church theologians expected to give birth to the Anti-Christ. This second Triad family includes:

- **Gertrude**, who at the end holds the poisoned Chalice containing a pearl, represents the Whore of Babylon, adorned with gold and pearls, who also holds a chalice filled with abominations and will be made to drink a "double draught" of it (Rev. 18:6). Dressed in scarlet and purple the Whore was sometimes regarded as an allegory for the church.

- **Claudius**, is the "serpent" who stung Old Hamlet, and the Hyrcanian beast (the tiger), who is called an "adulterate beast". He represents the Beast from the Apocalypse which has the body of a leopard, heads like a serpent, and on whom the Whore rides. The heads are associated with the seven Caesars and sometimes with the seven hills of Rome---- and Claudius is of course the name of the Julio-Claudian dynasty of Caesars.

- **Old Hamlet,** is in Hell at the beginning of the play because he is specifically identified with Hyperion. Hyperion was the Greek god of light who was similar to Apollo—the god of the sun, fire and plagues—who was imprisoned in the pit Tartarus. His equivalent in the *Book of Revelation* is Apollyon, the destroyer—who was the king of Hell—and

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escapes from the pit. The play clearly associates him with the devil "The spirit that I have seen/May be the devil: and the devil hath power/ To assume a pleasing shape."

The Character of Hamlet Himself

If Prince Hamlet is allegorically the son of the devil, as the son of Hyperion he is also an allegory for Helios, the god of the sun. As if "loosed out of hell" (2,1,82), he frightens and interrupts Ophelia while she is sewing and bends the "light" (2,1,100) of his eyes upon her. This parodies the beams of light that marked the Archangel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary while she is sewing as shown in Renaissance paintings. Ophelia's later appearance with her abortifacient herbs—identified by Newman and others---suggests that she aborts the baby.

One way of reconciling these attributes would be to posit Hamlet as representing the Archangel Lucifer, the light bearer, the star who fell from heaven into hell. Lucifer is mentioned, for instance, in *Henry V,* "arrayed in flames like to the prince of fiends" (3,3,16). Hamlet imagines wearing Provincial roses on his shoes, which were used by stage actors to indicate a cloven foot, a well-known signifier of the devil. He also uses expressions used by the Vice or comic devil on the English stage. His identity as the Anti-Christ is further made clear by the three allegorical identities he takes on;

- **Martin Luther,** regarded by Catholics as the second Anti-Christ. Steve Sohmer has used the pattern of feast days in the play to work out that the initial part of the play is set on the day before Luther nailed the 95 theses of the Reformation to the church door in Wittenberg. In addition Hamlet's melancholy parallels Luther's, both men wore black and he is associated several times with Wittenberg.

- **Emperor Nero,** regarded as the first Anti-Christ. Various events echo the *Life of Nero* in the well known history *The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius: the matricide, killing of the Emperor Claudius, his interest in music, being an actor, performing onstage, acting in a play about Orestes, writing verse, playing pranks, being pursued by a ghost, and being mad. Moreover, according to Suetonius, Nero was known as Nero-Orestes, and other parts of Hamlet's character come from Orestes. Nero was also compared to the sun god, and Hamlet is an allegory for Helios the son of Hyperion. It would appear that Hamlet is struggling to prevent the soul of Nero from taking over his body. He does not succeed.

- **The Sea Beast,** Hamlet comes back from the Sea and resembles the Beast from the Sea in the Book of Revelation who makes images of the first beast (in the play, the brooches/portraits of Claudius), who was widely identified as the Anti-Christ.

This Apocalypse All Goes Wrong

In summary, *Hamlet* parodies the catalogues of sevens from the *Book of Revelation*, and the main characters are parodies of the characters in *Revelation*. In addition *Hamlet* uses some of *A Fig for Fortune*, an allegorical religious poem. The play is set on Apocalypse, Doomsday, which is mentioned 5 times in the play. Many strange aspects of the plot such as the references to Wormwood, and the attack by Laertes (as Christ) on

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the citadel of Claudius, come directly from the *Book of Revelation's* depictions of Doomsday.

The play opens with the cock crowing and the waiting which are both an allusion to Advent—the season in which "our Saviour's birth is celebrated" (1,1,164). But Advent could also imply the Second Advent, or *Parousia*, the second coming of Christ, which took place on Doomsday. This is why the gravediggers say that graves last to Doomsday. They then proceed to unmake those graves by taking the skulls out, showing that it is therefore Doomsday, when the spirits are resurrected from their graves. Except that in this parodic play, their skulls are crudely thrown out rather than resurrected.

The allegorical plot of *Hamlet* is completely opposite to the *Book of Revelation*–a complete parody of the most sacred Christian doctrines. The king of hell escapes from the pit, and the devil tells his son Lucifer to take revenge for his death and incarceration. The son of the devil takes on the identity of 3 Anti-Christs. He first impregnates the Virgin Mary/Woman Crowned with the Sun (Ophelia), leading her to abort the baby and then die. He kills God the father (Polonius) and then the Resurrected Christ (Laertes) in a sword fight. He then ends up killing directly or indirectly, both the Church (Gertrude) and Rome (Claudius). The Rule of God (which is the meaning of the name of the minor courtier Osric in the play) is utterly ineffective. The playwright is parodying the *Book of Revelation* in showing an Apocalypse *that fails* and in which no golden city descends from the heavens. Instead, after Horatio refers to the *paradisum*, asking that Hamlet should be received in Jerusalem (5,2,365), what arrives is Fortinbrass, an apparent comic parody of Jerusalem, alluding to the analogous Fort-in-Brass, or City of Brass, in *The Arabian Nights*.

PART TWO: THE MOUSETRAP

Having shown that much of *Hamlet* is a parody of Christian doctrine sets the context for considering the center-piece of the play, the Mousetrap. The Mousetrap has nothing to do with the *Book of Revelation,* which opens up the possibility that it might be an allegory of some other Christian text. We can identify what that text might be by isolating the unique features that the writer of *Hamlet* added to the original source.

In Kyd's original play, Hamlet simply imagines that the actors could play a scene that would re-enact Claudius's crime, and in which the actors will 'switch places' by mirroring the king, queen and the murderer. Hamlet then reassures Claudius that there is nothing uncivil in what the actors will perform, and the play then takes place— a very short dumbshow.

The Playwright's Additions

In the world of the Ur-Hamlet, the 'play within the play' is very minimal. It is not given a name at all, let alone being mysteriously called the 'Mousetrap', or having a fuss made about the name. Nor is any kind of provenance attributed to it---- whereas in the

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different versions of the Shakespearean play the crime is indicated as taking place in Vienna or Guyana, both of which are historically incorrect, since it actually took place in Urbino, and Gonzago (3,2,233) was the murderer not the victim.

In the Ur-Hamlet, there are no references to the two mouse poisons, chameleon, and wormwood. Equally, Polonius is not a rat, Claudius's wife is not called a mouse and is not named after St. Gertrude (the patron saint of mouse plagues). Hamlet is not the son of Hyperion, and does not therefore have the traditional 3rd century title *Smitheus* 'the Mousekiller'. For that matter, the Polonius character never acted the part of Julius Caesar, the king is not named after a dynasty of Caesars and does not squeeze men like sponges, as the Emperor Vespasian did – a Flavian emperor who plays an important role in the allegory the Mousetrap enacts, as we shall see. Nor does Hamlet imagine becoming possessed by the soul of the Emperor Nero.

The Revisions to the Mousetrap

Further information about the source that the playwright was parodying can be gained from the revisions that were made during the process of composition. Following the minority of scholars in assuming that the 1603 and 1605 Quartos are substantially the playwright's successive drafts, rather than being 'bad' quartos or memorial reconstructions, the Mousetrap became increasingly elaborated, in terms of length, in terms of Senecan style, and in terms of centricity.

- **Length,** in the 1603 Quarto, the 'play-within-the-play' is extremely elementary. The Player King (Duke) begins with an 8 line speech and the Player Queen (Duchess) has a 2 line speech. The text makes no mythological references, and is very matter of fact that the Player King is going to die (Q1 lines 1311-1321). However in the 1605 Quarto this has grown to 19 lines, and was cut slightly for the version in the First Folio.

- **Style,** between 1603 and 1605, the Mousetrap developed new mythological references to Neptune's tides, Hymen, and Phoebus' cart which derive from Seneca. Similarly, the preceding neo-Senecan epic Pyrrhus speech which originally occupied only 29 lines, doubled to 64 lines in the First Folio (2,2,445-514).

- **Positioning,** the Mousetrap was given increasing centricity. There were no act divisions in the quartos, but in the Folio the Mousetrap appears in Act 3 just after the grand royal entrance that is essentially the center of the play. Furthermore, the Mousetrap is framed on either side by references to playing pipes (3,2,46-91 and 3,2,289-378). One of these lines originated in the 1603 Quarto "will you play upon this pipe" (3,2,341), but the other line about flattery, "That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger / To sound what stop she please" (3,2,70-71), was added in precisely in order to create this structural symmetry.

So if, like the rest of *Hamlet*, the Mousetrap has been constructed as a religious parody, to discover what it is parodying we need to find a document that meets the following criteria: it must be significant to Christian beliefs, be theatrically influenced by Seneca,

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have a symmetrically framed literary construction, must concern Caesars and mice, and characters must switch places with one another like the Player King, Player Queen and the Poisoner do with Old Hamlet, Gertrude and Claudius. This narrows it down to only one possibility, the Testimonium, which is part of Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*.

The Testimonium Triptych

The playwright used the works of Josephus in other plays, for instance in the reference in *King John* to the "mutines of Jerusalem" (2,1,400), the mothers who boil and eat their babies in *Two Noble Kinsmen* (1,3,20-21), and in the composition of *Anthony and Cleopatra*, as listed by Bullough. So there is no reason why *Hamlet* also should not be making a reference to Josephus's *Antiquities* which had been published in English in 1602. It contains a section known as the Testimonium Flavianum, or in English the 'Flavian Testament' (Ant. 18, 3). This was held to be the only documentary evidence for the historical existence of Jesus, so it is certainly an important Christian text. Although it began to be questioned by a few European humanists in the late 16th century, it is today generally regarded as having been authentically included in *Jewish Antiquities* late during the Josephean compositional process and to be at least partly authentic.

Atwill's analysis of the Testimonium which has so far not been taken into account by scholars, provides a new perspective which allows the Testimonium to be compared with the Mousetrap as follows:

- **Symmetry.** The Testimonium passage was regarded by historians in isolation from its immediate literary context, but it can now be seen to form the left hand side of a literary Triptych. The Triptych has a symmetrical literary structure found in the Hebrew Bible and technically known as pedimental composition. The right hand side concerns a wicked Jewish priest who can be identified as Saint Paul, by being linked to the name Paulina, and the closing of the Temple gates which he occasions in the *Book of Acts*. In the center there is a prominent passage about a strange character called Decius Mundus. The left side, or Testimonium, mentions Jesus as the Christ, who after his death appeared alive on the third day and who was a teacher of "such people who accept the truth gladly"—a characteristically Josephean phrase.

- **Mouse and Caesar.** Decius Mundus appears to be a pun on the famous three generational family of Roman military heroes all called Decius Mus, the Tenth Mouse. In addition, the Triptych features Tiberius Caesar. So the Triptych fulfills the odd criterion that the text must concern a Caesar and a mouse.

- **Character switching.** In the same way that in *Hamlet* the identities of the players in the Mousetrap are switched for Claudius, Gertrude and old Hamlet, the Testimonium requires readers to switch the identities of some of the characters in the central passage with characters in the side passages to understand the hidden meaning. The Triptych uses a kind of substitution cipher, requiring characters to change places and is a literary equivalent of the codes that were used in imperial military communications. This technique occasionally surfaced in Roman literary circles, such as in a 4th century epigram by Ausonius. Working out of the Emperor Vespasian's town house, it appears

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> that Josephus and his team of writers designed the Testimonium as a literary puzzle. This perhaps was why Justus of Tiberius claimed that Josephus's works were "fabulous", and another contemporary writer referred to them as "scholastic exercises" (*Against Apion* 1.10.53).

The church's reading of the Testimonium, like that of any casual reader, simply understood the surface story as if it were a static novella. However, by means of the strange reference to a mouse and a Caesar, the Mousetrap alludes to the Testimonium and invites the reader to *apply to it the same literary assumptions.* If we do so, and treat the Triptych as a piece of theater in which the characters are switched around, then, as the authors of the Triptych intended, a new story emerges. As we will now see, far from being a peculiar testimony to the historical existence of Jesus, the Testimonium is *precisely the opposite.*

Setting the Testimonium in Motion

Atwill plausibly regards the figure of Decius Mundus as a pun on the military victors Decius Mus. This generates the figure of the World/Mouse which would appear to represent the family of the Three Military Victors of the World. Since the works of Josephus were created at the Flavian court, this is a reference to the three Flavian Caesars, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. Further evidence is that Decius sleeps at the temple of Isis, as both Vespasian and Titus did on one occasion. To confirm that identity, the decisive evidence is that when the Testimonium is set in motion the Decius Mundus figure destroys the temple at Jerusalem, as Titus and Vespasian certainly did.

Decius puts on the mask of a false god Anubis in order to persuade an Anubis worshiper to have sex with him, so that he can gain hedonistic pleasure. Then on the third day he reveals that he is not a god after all. The temple is destroyed and the priests crucified. To understand this, these events have to be switched with their exact equivalents in the side panels of the Triptych. By substituting the temple of Jerusalem, mentioned in the right hand panel, with the temple of Isis mentioned in the center, this event becomes set not at the temple of Isis (which remained standing until the 1600s) but at the temple of Jerusalem (which certainly was destroyed and whose priests indeed were crucified). Similarly, by switching the identities of the two women who are deceived by wicked priests, the woman who Decius deceives is not an Anubis worshipper, but becomes Jewish. By switching the identity of the gods who are associated with hedonistic pleasure and with a revelation on the third day, the god whose false mask Decius wears is not Anubis, but Jesus.

In combination, this simple switch of identities creates the following algorithm. *The Three Military Victors of the World destroy the temple of Jerusalem and by wearing the mask of the false god Jesus deceive the Jew(s) into worshipping them.* This seems to support the emerging radical New Testament theory, known as the 'Caesar's messiah' model, that the gospels were created by the Flavian Caesars as literary allegories---as an

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act of Senecan revenge to deceive the Jews into worshiping Caesar in the guise of a pro-Roman, pacifistic, literary messiah.

The Mousetrap as a Counter Allegory

Since Lodge's translation of *Jewish Antiquities* was published in English in 1602, just a year before the first Quarto of *Hamlet*, knowing that the underlying literary allegory is the Testimonium creates a new perspective on the Mousetrap. Firstly, the Mousetrap was apparently written to provide the clues that would allow readers to identify the Testimonium, to understand its covert meaning and the challenge it represents to Christian orthodoxy.

But that is not all. In addition, it would appear that the Mousetrap was created as an act of revenge, *as a counter-satire*. This Mousetrap is set to catch a Caesar, Claudius the allegorical seven headed Caesar beast from the *Book of Revelation*. Since the Beast from the Land was recognized as a contemporary allegory for Vespasian, and since Claudius squeezes men like sponges—as Vespasian did in his tax gathering—this Mousetrap is apparently set to 'catch' Vespasian Caesar. The mysterious reason it is called a 'Mousetrap', and the reason Claudius is an allegorical mouse, therefore has nothing to do with the 'Death of Gonzago', but goes back to Vespasian's literary identity as the primary World/ Mouse in the Testimonium Triptych.

Conclusion

This paper builds on the work of a handful of innovative scholars who have recognized the underlying Apocalypse in *Hamlet*, especially the writings of Linda Hoff, Chris Hassel, Cherrell Guilfoyle, and Arthur McGee. This paper has taken their work further to suggest that the anti-Christian allegories both of the *Book of Revelation* and of the Testimonium Triptych represent the underlying deep structure of much of *Hamlet.* Indeed it suggests that the underlying reason the play was written was to parody some of the most sacred Christian texts in far-reaching ways. Granted that Richard Wilson has identified Shakespeare as a covert Catholic, it is difficult to imagine who in his circle would have had the poetic skills and motivation to create such extensive and risky parodies, other than the only person who is known to have created anything similar, the so-called 'Dark Lady' Amelia Bassano Lanier.

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